
AP[®] World History: Modern

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

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Long Essay Question 2

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Question 2: Long Essay Question, Belief Systems and Societies in Asia

6 points

General Scoring Notes

- Except where otherwise noted, each point of these rubrics is earned independently; for example, a student could earn a point for evidence without earning a point for thesis/claim.
- **Accuracy:** The components of these rubrics require that students demonstrate historically defensible content knowledge. Given the timed nature of the exam, essays may contain errors that do not detract from their overall quality, as long as the historical content used to advance the argument is accurate.
- **Clarity:** Exam essays should be considered first drafts and thus may contain grammatical errors. Those errors will not be counted against a student unless they obscure the successful demonstration of the content knowledge, skills, and practices described below.

In the period circa 1200 to 1450, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism included ideas about social structures, gender roles, and political authority that influenced societies across Asia.

Develop an argument that evaluates the extent to which one or more of these belief systems shaped societies and/or political systems in Asia during this period.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis/Claim (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Responds to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis/claim that establishes a line of reasoning.
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Are not historically defensible. - Only restate or rephrase the prompt. - Do not respond to the prompt. - Do not establish a line of reasoning. - Are overgeneralized.	Responses that earn this point: Provide a historically defensible thesis or claim about the extent to which belief systems shaped societies and/or political systems in Asia in the period during the period circa 1200 to 1450. The thesis or claim must either provide some indication of the reason for making that claim OR establish categories of the argument.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Provide a restatement of the prompt <i>“Belief systems, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, shaped the political systems of Asia in the period 1200 to 1450.”</i> Provide a historically defensible claim, but do not establish a line of reasoning <i>“Buddhism spread from India to China via the Silk Roads.”</i> Does not respond to the prompt <i>“Islam expanded throughout Asia via trade.”</i>	Examples that earn this point: Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt <i>“Rulers of various Asian states, including the Song Dynasty in China and the Khmer Empire in Southeast Asia, used Confucianism, Buddhism, or Hinduism to legitimize their rule.”</i> Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt with analytic categories <i>“While the philosophy of Confucianism strengthened the Chinese state by maintaining imperial bureaucracy and social hierarchies, it also provided a justification for subjects to rebel against or even overthrow the ruling dynasty if they believed that it had lost the Mandate of Heaven.”</i> Establish a line of reasoning <i>“Confucianism shaped the culture of China by providing support for patriarchy.”</i> [Minimally acceptable thesis/claim]
Additional Notes: - The thesis or claim must consist of one or more sentences located in one place, either in the introduction or the conclusion (which may not be limited to the first or last paragraphs). - The thesis or claim must identify a relevant development(s) in the period, although it is not required to encompass the entire period.		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row B Contextualization (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Describes a broader historical context relevant to the prompt.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Provide an overgeneralized statement about the time period referenced in the prompt. - Provide context that is not relevant to the prompt. - Provide a passing phrase or reference. Examples that do not earn this point: Do not provide context relevant to the topic of the prompt <i>“Zheng He’s maritime exploration of the Indian Ocean connected China to the wider world.”</i> Provide a passing phrase or reference <i>“Zen Buddhism was practiced in Japan.”</i>	Responses that earn this point: - Accurately describe a context relevant to belief systems, societies, or political systems in Asia during the period circa 1200 to 1450. Examples of relevant context that earn this point include the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided: - Chinese neo-Confucianist traditions and their spread to Heian Japan and Korea - Various branches and schools of Buddhist thought - The spread of Hinduism and Buddhism into Southeast Asia - The role of patriarchy on society and the state in many Asian societies - Rejection of Legalism in China - Buddhism in Tang China - Hindu merchants in SE Asia - The Song Dynasty’s economic “miracle” and the Song Emperors’ support for Confucianism and Daoism Example of acceptable contextualization: <i>“Buddhism spread from its original home in South Asia, first to China, and from there even further east to Korea and Japan.”</i> <i>“Throughout the 1200s, many new Buddhist and Hindu states developed in Southeast Asia.”</i> [Minimally acceptable contextualization]
	Additional Notes: - The response must describe broader historical events, developments, or processes that occur before, during, or continue after the time frame of the question that are relevant to the topic of the prompt. - To earn this point, the context provided must be more than a phrase or reference.	

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
Row C Evidence (0–2 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Provides specific examples of at least two pieces of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt.	2 points Supports an argument in response to the prompt using at least two pieces of specific and relevant evidence.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn points: - Identify a single piece of evidence. - Provide evidence that is not relevant to the topic of the prompt. - Provide evidence that is outside the time period or region specified in the prompt. - Repeat information that is specified in the prompt. Examples that do not earn points: Provide evidence that is outside the time period <i>“The Manchu people of northeast China established the Qing Dynasty.”</i>	Responses that earn 1 point: - Identify at least two specific historical examples relevant to belief systems shaping societies or political systems in Asia during the period circa 1200 to 1450. Examples of evidence that are specific and relevant include the following (two examples required): - The Song dynasty’s use of Confucian practices and principles such as the imperial examination system - Neo Confucianism and the rising social prestige of the Confucian scholarly class - Foot binding for elite women - The Yuan Dynasty’s use of Chinese belief systems to help strengthen its rule over China - The revival of Buddhism in China under the Yuan Dynasty - Specific examples of new Hindu and Buddhist states that emerged in South and Southeast Asia - Specific beliefs that affected societies, such as filial piety or the Hindu division of society into four <i>varnas</i> and numerous <i>jatis</i> [castes] - The five relationships of Confucianism - Buddhist monasteries - Deference to women in Hindu and Confucian society - Mandate of Heaven, Shinto, kami spirits Example of a statement that earns one point for evidence: <i>“Korean leaders adopted Neo-Confucianism as the state ideology and used a version of the Chinese examination system to recruit state officials.”</i>	Responses that earn 2 points: - Use at least two specific historical examples to support an argument regarding how belief systems shaped societies and/or political systems in Asia during the period circa 1200 to 1450. Examples that successfully support an argument with evidence: <i>“The Mongol rulers of the Yuan Dynasty claimed the Mandate of Heaven and supported Confucian scholars and Buddhist monks. This allowed the Yuan emperors to portray themselves as the legitimate rulers of China.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about the Mandate of Heaven legitimizing Mongol rule in China.] <i>“In India Hinduism taught that different social groups had always been separate and ought to remain that way forever. This led to the emergence of a rigid caste system, which gave predominance to the priestly Brahmin group and the warrior group who often combined to form the political elites of various Hindu states.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about how Hinduism shaped social and political structures in India]
	Additional Notes: - Typically, statements credited as evidence will be more specific than statements credited as contextualization. - If a response has a multipart argument, then it can meet the threshold of two pieces of evidence by giving one example for one part of the argument and another example for a different part of the argument, but the total number of examples must still be at least two.		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
Row D Analysis and Reasoning Complex Understanding	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Uses historical reasoning [e.g. comparison, causation, continuity and change] to frame or structure an argument that addresses the prompt.	2 points Demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt through sophisticated argumentation and/or effective use of evidence.
(0–2 points)	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn points: - May include evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to an argument. - May assert the use of historical reasoning but does not use it to frame or structure an argument.	Responses that earn 1 point: Must demonstrate the use of historical reasoning to frame or structure an argument about the extent to which belief systems shaped societies and/or political systems in Asia during the period circa 1200 to 1450. The reasoning might be uneven or imbalanced, or the evidence may be overly general or lacking specificity.	Responses that earn 2 points: May demonstrate a complex understanding through sophisticated argumentation that is relevant to the prompt. This may be done in a variety of ways, such as: - Explaining multiple themes or perspectives to explore complexity or nuance; OR - Explaining multiple causes or effects, multiple similarities or differences, or multiple continuities or changes; OR - Explaining both cause and effect, both similarity and difference, or both continuity and change; OR - Explaining relevant and insightful connections within and across periods or geographical areas. These connections should clearly relate to an argument that responds to the prompt. May demonstrate a complex understanding through effective use of evidence relevant to an argument that addresses the prompt. This may be done in a variety of ways that might include: - Explaining how multiple pieces of specific and relevant evidence [at least four] support a nuanced or complex argument that responds to the prompt; OR - Using evidence effectively to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of different perspectives relevant to the prompt.
	Examples that do not earn points: Provide evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to an argument <i>“The Khmer Empire adopted Buddhism.”</i>	Using a historical reasoning process to frame or structure an argument could include: - Explaining how the egalitarianism of Buddhism encouraged or supported greater equality in some societies by allowing anyone to pursue salvation through, either through ethical living as a layperson or through deeper emphasis on religious and spiritual practice in monastic communities. - Explaining how Confucianism was a patriarchal system that supported elders and male authority figures, which maintained conservative social	Demonstrating a complex understanding might include any of the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided: Explaining how Confucianism and Buddhism influenced societies in different and sometimes contradictory ways. For example, providing evidence both for Confucianism’s patriarchal core beliefs through the concept of the “four relationships” but also explaining how Confucian writings glorified women who lived up to the Confucian idea for the ideal wife or daughter; for Buddhism, explaining how while men held the most powerful and respected positions [for example the lamas in Tibetan Buddhism], women also could achieve a prominent role in Buddhist hierarchies by becoming nuns and abbesses. [Explains how

		systems in many regions of East Asia and limited women's roles. Example of acceptable use of historical reasoning: • <i>"The revival of Confucianism during the Song Dynasty led to a tightening of patriarchal restrictions on women because of the Confucian belief in the father/emperor having ultimate control over his family/people."</i> [Indicates an effect of Confucianism on women]	at least four pieces of evidence support a nuanced or complex argument] • Explaining how Buddhism had many different expressions in different Asian societies, including Theravada Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, Mahayana Buddhism in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, and Tibet. Considering how Buddhism became the state philosophy in Southeast Asia and Tibet, while it was largely viewed as a foreign cultural tradition by state elites in China. And considering how Buddhism became a syncretic tradition that mixed with elements of Taoism in China and Shinto in Japan. [Explains nuance by exploring multiple themes or perspectives] • Explaining similarities between the social effects of the monastic tradition in Christianity and the social effects of the monastic tradition in Buddhism; for example, discussing similarities in the importance of monasteries and nunneries as institutions, the interaction between the monastic establishment and political power, and the importance of the tradition of poverty and charity among members of the monastic communities. [Explains multiple similarities]
	Additional Notes: • To earn the first point for analysis and reasoning, the response must use historical reasoning to structure a response to the prompt, although the reasoning might be uneven or imbalanced, or the evidence may be overly general or lacking in specificity. • This complex understanding must be part of the argument and may be demonstrated in any part of the response. • While it is not necessary for this complex understanding to be woven throughout the response, it must be more than merely a phrase or reference.		

Thesis: Both Hinduism and Confucianism had a profound impact on their societies, and could often be referred to as theocracies. The belief systems of these religions impacted their societies in the way of social hierarchies, gender roles, and the maintenance of power. It allowed governments to justify the treatment of their citizens based on their religious teachings.

Context: Both Hinduism and Confucianism came from past societies that had used it before the rulers of this time period. For example, the Song Dynasty, who was in charge of China during this time period, actually instigated a second wave of Confucianism known as Neoconfucianism. This meant that they were able to keep the most productive parts of the religion or philosophy, and were able to better conduct their government. Hinduism is also a religion that dates back many years. In both cases, the idea of the continuity of tradition most likely assisted in the strength of these theocracies.

Body Paragraph 1: Both religions greatly impacted the way that their societies functioned based on their beliefs about the social hierarchy, or the way that their societies should be socially structured. For example, in Hinduism, their social hierarchy was based on the caste system. This was the separation of classes based on occupation, skin color, and social rankings. This was also encouraged by their belief in reincarnation, which was the idea that one's success in their current life, and perfect completion of their given role in that lifetime, would move them up the social rankings until they finally achieved Moksha. The highest level of classes was known as the Brahmins, followed by the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas, Shudras, and finally the Dalits, or untouchables. Each social class had specific duties to uphold, and if you did your duties society would find their harmony.

Body Paragraph 2: In a similar way, Confucianism believed in the hierarchy of relationships, and that within these relationships there was one greater, and one lesser. For example, a king was greater than his rulers and would therefore be in charge of them, or a husband was greater than his wife, and was therefore in charge of her. In Confucian standards, this concept would also uphold harmony within society.

Body Paragraph 3: These religious ideas also allowed for those in power to maintain power. This is seen in the Hindu belief in reincarnation, and the idea that if one was to step out of their role in society, it would result in them moving down the chain, and farther away from Moksha. This meant that the authority figure were always respected, as they were seen as people who had done very well in their past lives and were therefore to be looked up to, and better than the people that they were ruling over. If one did not question their rulers, they would then move up the ranks.

Body Paragraph 4: Confucianism's social hierarchies also assisted in its ability to maintain its power, not to mention the ancient Chinese belief in the mandate of heaven. The mandate of heaven was the belief that the gods had chosen the ruler, and if things started going badly during their rule, then it was a sign from the gods that a leadership change was needed. This meant that if everything was going well under the ruler at that time, subjects would tend not to question them. Confucian scholars also believed in education, which was expressed through the civil service exams. These exams could be taken by anyone, and if someone passed them, then they would be able to move up the social ranks and work under the government. Giving access to all meant that people in lower classes were given the hope that they could move up the ranks. This most likely also led to less discomfort among the lower classes, as they knew they were not stuck in their unfortunate situation, but had an opportunity to move up, once again cementing those in power.

Complexity: Hindu and Confucious religions also commonly rejected other religions for the sake of government stability. This rejection of other religions can be compared the Spanish Inquisition, a movement in South America, where Spain attempted the stifle all of the native religious practices in that area in attempts to spread their own catholic beliefs to the native people. This often resulted in syncretic beliefs, or native people practicing their own religions in secret. The Spanish government in these areas attempted to form their own religious influences on their subjects, but because there was no history, or traditional practices in those areas already. The imposition of the religion was harder to catch on, and was no where near as succesful as the confucian and hindu religions.

During the period of 1200 to 1400, East Asia experienced significant political and social transformations, Confucianism, with its emphases on social harmony filial piety, and hierarchical relationships, played a crucial role on shaping the societies and the political systems of China, Korea, and Vietnam. While other belief systems also exerted influence, Confucianism's impact was particularly profound due to its integration into the state bureaucracy and social norms

Confucianism's Role in East Asian societies

The Confucianism significantly influenced social structures by reinforcing hierarchical relationships. The concept of filial piety which emphasized respect and obedience to elders and superiors, became a cornerstone of family and social life. In China, the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and later the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) promoted Confucian values through education and the civil service Examinations system. This system, based on Confucian classics, ensured that government officials were well versed in Confucian principles further embedding these values in governance and the society

Confucianism's Impact on Political Systems

Confucianism also shaped political systems by providing a moral framework for governance. The concept of the Mandate of Heaven, which legitimized the rule of emperors based on their ability to govern.

In the period 1200 to 1450 Confucianism heavily shaped political systems in asia during this time due to Confucianisms ideas of specfic social heiarchies such as the belief the children are below adults and should listen to them. For context, in this time period places such as china followed very strict social hiarchies they followed that completely structured the way their political structures worked.

Long Essay Question 2

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

NEW for 2025: The question overviews can be found in the *Chief Reader Report on Student Responses on AP Central*.

Sample: 2A

Thesis Score: 1

Contextualization Score: 1

Evidence Score: 2

Analysis and Reasoning Score: 2

Total Score: 6

Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for thesis by providing a historically defensible claim and a line of reasoning regarding the extent to which belief systems affected Asian societies and politics. The thesis, found in the first paragraph, states that “The belief systems of these religions impacted their societies in the way of social hierarchies, gender roles, and the mainenance of power.”

Contextualization (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for contextualization in the second paragraph, by situating the development of belief systems in China in the context of the Song Dynasty’s promotion of Neo-Confucianism.

Evidence (0–2 points): 2

The response earned 1 point for using evidence. The response provides multiple pieces of accurate evidence relevant to religions shaping societies and/or political systems in Asia. In the third paragraph, the response provides multiple pieces of evidence related to the impact of Hinduism on societies, including references to the caste system, the belief in reincarnation, Moksha, and the major social groups in Hindu society (Brahmins, “Ksaitryas,” “Vaisyas,” Shudras, and Dalits). In the fourth paragraph, the response provides several pieces of evidence relevant to Confucianism’s impact on societies, including stating that “Confucianism believed in the hierarchy of relationships,” referring to the relationship between husband and wife, and mentioning the idea that social harmony was the result of members of each social class doing their duties. The response also states that, under Confucianism, “a king was greater than his rulers and would therefore be in charge of them” but “rulers” here is likely a typo and the sentence was treated as a read-through error. The response provides further evidence about Confucianism’s social impact in the sixth paragraph, referring to the “chinese belief in the mandate of heaven” and the Civil Service Exam.

Long Essay Question 2 (continued)

The response earned 1 point for supporting an argument with evidence. In the fifth paragraph, the response makes the argument that “religious ideas also allowed for those in power to maintain power” and supports that argument by explaining how the Hindu belief in reincarnation “meant that the authority figure were always respected, as they were seen as people who had done very well in their past lives and were therefore to be looked up to.” In the sixth paragraph, the response makes the argument that “Confucianisms social heirarchies also assisted in its ability to maintain its power” and supports that argument with an explanation of the role of the concept of the Mandate of Heaven. Also in the fifth paragraph, the response makes the argument that Confucianism provided opportunities to move up in society, which “most likely also led to less discomfort among the lower classes, as they knew they were not stuck in their unfortunate situation” and supports that argument with an explanation about the ways in which the civil service exam offered such opportunities.

Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 2

The response earned 1 point for historical reasoning. The response repeatedly uses historical reasoning, particularly causation and continuity and change over time, to explain how religious beliefs like Confucianism and Hinduism legitimized or provided justification for existing political systems in Asian societies. The response consistently and explicitly uses historical reasoning to frame and structure the evidence it provides.

The response earned 1 point for complex understanding. The response demonstrates complex understanding through effective use of evidence (more than four pieces) used in support of a multi-pronged argument that addresses the prompt. The response also repeatedly draws parallels between the role of Hinduism and Buddhism in sustaining and legitimizing political power even though such a comparison is not required by the prompt. Some of the arguments developed in the response show evidence of a nuanced understanding of the effects of belief systems on Asian society. For example, at the end of the sixth paragraph, the response states that even though the Confucian civil service exam offered the lower classes “an opportunity to move up” it also had the effect of “once again cementing those in power.” In the seventh paragraph (labeled “Complexity” in the response), there is an attempt to earn the point for Complex Understanding by drawing a comparison between Hinduism and Confucianism on the one hand and the Spanish Inquisition on the other. This attempt (based on the claim that, like the Spanish Inquisition, Hinduism and Confucianism, “commonly rejected other religions for the sake of government stability”) does not explain a relevant or insightful connection with other periods or historical contexts and was not credited towards earning the point for complex understanding.

Long Essay Question 2 (continued)**Sample: 2B****Thesis Score: 1****Contextualization Score: 0****Evidence Score: 2****Analysis and Reasoning Score: 1****Total Score: 4****Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for thesis by providing a historically defensible claim and a line of reasoning regarding the extent to which belief systems affected Asian societies and politics. The thesis, found in the first paragraph, states that “Confucianism, with its emphases on social harmony filial piety, and hierarchical relationships, played a crucial role on shaping the societies and the political systems of China, Korea, and Vietnam.” The next sentence, “While other belief systems also exerted influence, Confucianism’s impact was particularly profound due to its integration into the state bureaucracy and social norms” also provides a historically defensible claim and a line of reasoning and could have also been used to earn the thesis point.

Contextualization (0–1 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for contextualization. The response does not make an attempt to situate the topic of the prompt within a broader historical context.

Evidence (0–2 points): 2

The response earned 1 point for using evidence. In the second paragraph, the response identifies the concept of filial piety, the promotion of Confucianism by the Song and Ming dynasties in China, and the Civil Service Exam. In the third paragraph, the response additionally identifies the concept of the Mandate of Heaven.

The response earned 1 point for supporting an argument with evidence. In the second paragraph, the response makes the argument that Confucianism “significantly influenced social structures by reinforcing hierarchical relationships” and supports that argument by using the concept of filial piety as evidence. Also in the second paragraph, the response makes the argument that Confucianism became embedded “in governance and the society” of China and supports that argument with the evidence of the Civil Service Exam. In the third paragraph, the response makes the argument that “Confucianism also shaped political systems by providing a moral framework for governance” and supports that argument by using the concept of the Mandate of Heaven as evidence.

Long Essay Question 2 (continued)**Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for historical reasoning. The response uses historical reasoning, particularly causation, to frame its arguments about the impact of Confucianism on Chinese society and politics. For example, the response notes that filial piety “became a cornerstone of family and social life,” that the Civil Service Exam “ensured that government officials were well versed in confucian principles,” and that the concept of the Mandate of Heaven “legitimized the rule of emperors based on their ability to govern.”

The response did not earn the point for complex understanding. There is no attempt to develop a complex or nuanced argument or to demonstrate a complex understanding through sophisticated analysis and/or effective use of evidence.

Sample: 2C**Thesis Score: 1****Contextualization Score: 0****Evidence Score: 0****Analysis and Reasoning Score: 0****Total Score: 1****Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for thesis by providing a historically defensible claim and a line of reasoning regarding the extent to which belief systems affected Asian societies. The thesis, located in the first sentence, states that “Confucianism heavily shaped political systems in Asia during this time due to Confucianism’s ideas of specific social hierarchies such as the belief the children are below adults and should listen to them.” Even though there is a mismatch between the claim’s focus on political systems and the line of reasoning that only addresses impacts on societies and/or social hierarchies, this statement was sufficient to earn the point.

Contextualization (0–1 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for contextualization. In the second sentence, the response makes an attempt to situate the topic of the prompt in a broader historical context, but the attempt is overgeneralized, stating only that, “places such as China followed very strict social hierarchies.”

Evidence (0–2 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for using evidence. There are no attempts to provide any pieces of specific historical evidence.

The response did not earn the point for supporting an argument with evidence. The response does not offer any claims or arguments outside of its minimally acceptable thesis, nor does it offer any evidence in support of an argument.

Long Essay Question 2 (continued)

Analysis and Reasoning: (0–2 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for historical reasoning. The response does not use comparison, causation, or continuity and change over time to frame or structure an argument.

The response did not earn the point for demonstrating complex understanding. There was no attempt to demonstrate a complex understanding of how belief systems shaped societies and/ or political systems in Asia.